

Virginia Saltwater Recreational Fishing Development Fund Evaluation of a Proposal for the Development of a Tangible Structure, Facility or Educational Program

Project Number: L

Date: March 3, 2007

Title: Saxis Pier Expansion

The Virginia Saltwater Recreational Fishing Development Fund is to be used solely for the purpose of conserving and enhancing finfish taken by recreational anglers, enforcing laws and regulations related to natural resource conservation, improving recreational fishing opportunities, administering the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament program, obtaining necessary data and conducting research for fisheries management, and creating or restoring habitat for species taken by recreational fishermen.

Code of Virginia, Section 28.2-302.3

A. Project Purpose

1. Does the project meet statutory guidelines for funding?

This project clearly meets statutory guidelines for funding, since its sole purpose is to improve recreational fishing opportunities by providing improved and expanded access for saltwater fishermen.

2. Does the project fulfill a real need and/or provide a substantial benefit to the saltwater recreational fishery?

This project fulfills a very real need of the saltwater recreational fishery. Access for shorebound (boatless) anglers along the shoreline of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries is limited (and shrinking) due to the private ownership of most land. The value of waterfront land continues to increase rapidly, making the provision of recreational fishing access (piers, ramps, slips) by private enterprise less attractive due to the large parking infrastructure needed and better returns for other land uses. Providing pier and/or shoreline access for less affluent saltwater fishermen is certainly a real need and will provide a real benefit.

2. Does the project provide its main, or substantial, benefits within Virginia territorial waters or the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries – areas where the saltwater license is required?

This project provides all of its benefits in Saxis, a saltwater area where a saltwater fishing license is required.

B. Project Analysis

1. What are the project's strengths?

This project is the expansion of an existing facility, which provides a track record of demonstrated use by the recreational fishing public for consideration of the RFAB. Unfortunately, the expansion will be considered during the winter months when utilization rates cannot be observed by this reviewer or members of the RFAB. Talks with persons familiar with the pier indicate the usage is seasonally high, especially when croakers are available. The town has ample parking to support an expansion of the pier size and can accommodate a large number of users.

The Pocomoke Sound, where the current pier is located, is a shallow, estuarine area with good fishing for panfish. Spot, croaker, pigfish and other panfish comprise the bulk of the available species, and striped bass can be taken in season.

This project will likely be enjoyed by a good number of fishermen.

2. What are the project's weaknesses?

Projects weaknesses can be categorized into two groups: cost/benefit and design.

The cost/benefit issue is simply one of considering the gain derived from expanding a relatively new and perfectly good facility compared with the cost involved in the expansion, any benefits derived from the expansion and whether there are other projects in greater need of funding. Sited in a shallow, estuarine area, extending the pier 200 feet farther into Pocomoke Sound may increase water depths by 1 or 2 feet. There is a marked channel to the northwest of the pier, but expansion will not put pier users within its reach. Nautical charts show the pier as sited on a shallow "flat", so extending the pier 200 feet will not reach a significantly increased water depth or "drop-off". This reviewer raised the issue of water depth in his review of the original proposal to build the pier in 1998, but water depth estimates were not provided nor was there any indication from project managers that a longer pier would produce better fishing results. It is problematic as to whether expansion of the pier will produce access to substantially better fish or fishing.

The second aspect of the cost/benefit issue is whether pier usage would justify expansion of the pier. Unfortunately, utilization trends cannot be viewed firsthand by this reviewer at this time of the year. In talks with Accomac residents, the pier does receive a high rate of seasonal usage. The town's proposal estimates 15 people per day, on average, during the season, and the current facility can amply handle that number and more. In fact, the 100-foot T-end can easily

handle 25 anglers at one time - allotting 5 feet per angler. The utilization of the pier by the Eastern Shore Anglers Club for youth outings (1 or 2 times per year) does create crowded conditions, but justifying an expansion for a twice annual event does not seem appropriate. Planning for future utilization is important, as access opportunities for recreational fishermen continue to shrink. Weighing current and future demand for this facility will be needed to prioritize the need to expend money for the pier expansion. In short, the spending of \$176,000+ must be weighed against the benefit in the form of a need for more space now and in the future.

The design component is simply a look at the best design for a pier expansion. There were no drawings provided, but this reviewer understands from the oral presentation that the expansion would consist of another 200 feet extended down the middle of the pier with a second 100-foot T-head. Perhaps a design that would maximize the usable space on the pier would involve running the 200-foot extension from one of the ends of the current T-head, then putting a 100-foot T-head or L-head on the end of that extension. While asymmetrical in appearance, it might maximize the usability of the current 100-foot T-head once the extension is in place.

C. Project Budget

- 1. Is the budget realistic and reasonable for 1) the size and type of project proposed; 2) the number of people likely to benefit; and 3) the area benefiting from the project considering the area's number of saltwater fishermen and license sales?**

The total cost of this project is large, however it appears reasonable for the construction of a facility of this type. The potential number of people the project would benefit is large enough to justify the cost.

- 2. What is the local commitment to the project (cost sharing, future management and maintenance, in-kind commitments of personnel, etc.?)**

The town of Saxis will be committing a 25% "hard dollar" match, as required by RFAB guidelines.

D. Provide an overall evaluation of the project, including a numerical ranking of the project on the "Score" scale provided.

This is a good project for the saltwater recreational fishery, but this reviewer questions the immediacy of the need for the project. How often is this pier really too crowded? Planning for future access needs is a high priority; the private sector will not continue to foot the bill as rapidly escalating land costs make profitability of access ventures for the general public harder to achieve. The RFAB must determine if the time for this expansion is right – both from the immediate need at Saxis and from the standpoint of alternative fund usage. There is no doubt the rapidly increasing population on Virginia's Eastern Shore will strain public access areas in the near future; but here there is no immediate concern with land acquisition – the waterfront land supporting the pier is in public access. The question for this project is probably not whether the expansion should occur but whether it should occur now given current usage.

SCORE (Circle One)	Poor					Fair					Excellent
	0	1	2	3	4	5	[6]	7	8	9	10